

**The Washington State Arts Education Community Consortia Program
Year Two Report**

**Submitted to
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Executive Summary

The Washington State Arts Commission's (WSAC) Arts In Education Program developed the Arts Education Community Consortia Grants to support the capacity of local communities to implement the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements in the Arts (EALRs). Knowing that arts education programming is sustained in schools that involve the community, WSAC selected community collaboration funding as a tool to promote long-term community commitment. The grants primarily are funded by state dollars appropriated to the Arts Commission by the Washington State Legislature (93%) and secondarily by a Arts Commission's National Endowment for the Arts Grant (7%). Community funding support comes from many sources, including local foundations, businesses, school budgets, and individuals. The 2000-01 school year was the second year of this new grant program, which will continue to encourage linkages among local groups to build and improve arts education for pre-college youth.

Descriptive Information

What Was Spent

The WSAC awarded \$514,521 in Arts Education Community Consortium Grants. The recipients spent \$507,343 of the funds with \$7,178 (1.2%) being returned due to staffing changes that prevented two plans from being fully implemented. Other sources (foundations, local business, school systems, and individuals) contributed an additional \$669,351 (57%) of the total cash expenditures spent across the grantees. Additional non-cash in-kind supports, both volunteer time and materials, are estimated to be worth \$471,779. The actual cost per participant was \$4.10, approximately \$4 less per participant than in year one. The reduced costs appear to be the joint result of additional leveraged funds and an increase in the number of presentations and exhibitions serving large numbers of students and community members.

During year two, the Commission spent slightly more than it did in year one, but gained considerably more in locally leveraged funds. Several of the local grantees used their awards as a base to seek additional funding and considerable in-kind. One grantee said, *"[WSAC funding] made it possible to leverage additional grant support from many private foundations"*.

Participants

Thirty local grantees across Washington State participated in the second year of the community consortium grant program. Across the local consortiums, over 123,679 people participated in one of four roles: student, educator, artist, or community member. The largest group, as appropriate to an education project, was students (71%). The second largest group of participants was other community members (25%). These "others" were largely family members, but also local residents. The total served is more than double the number served during year one.

When the grantees applied for funds, they were required to list their partners by specified categories. Given the nature of the program, all applicants linked with an individual school and/or district. Other frequently listed partners were arts organizations, including art agencies

(97% of grantees), local business (93% of grantees), parent groups (93% of grantees), and arts education consultants (71%).

Grantee Locations

Local grantees were spread across the state with a mix of east-west and urban-rural sites. There were eight eastern grantees and 22 westerns ones. This mirrors the school population of the state with approximately 24% living in eastern communities and 76% living west of the mountains.

The Four Study Areas

Study Area #1: What Is Working

The patterns of benefits were close to those grantees mentioned last year with a few exceptions. One exception being three newly reported benefits: mentorships, culturally diverse and inclusive programming, and administrative changes to support the arts.

Mentorships

Although one site had experimented with mentorships for three high school students during the first year, the second year showed a 21% increase across sites. One elementary teacher who participated in a mentorship training approach said, *“The mentor is the expert, but she makes me feel like an equal.”* Adults were not the only mentees. Three sites included student mentorships. A teacher of one mentored student said, *“It is an important vehicle for students with musical and theater talent to perform at a level rarely experienced by most children.”* Those who tried mentorships found them to succeed *“beyond their wildest dreams”* as stated by one coordinator.

Culturally Diverse and Inclusive Programming

Year two classroom work and school-wide activities took artistic travels to many places and cultures such as Cuba, India, Local Native American, Peru, US historical events, American Folklore, European masters of long ago, the imaginary future, and the recent machine ages. Thirty-four percent of the sites discussed this as a benefit. But, the depth of inclusion seen in the second year of the grants goes further than art as tourism. All level of participants (coordinators, principals, teachers, artists, and the students) noted how much they learned about themselves and others. Places, art, and people’s perspectives came alive and changed. An eight grader summed it up by saying, *“People just think about themselves. I think that with this play, the 8th grade learned to think about others and they learned about the past also.”*

Administrative Changes to Support the Arts

Expanded arts budgets, setting up a new art room, hiring art teachers to ensure that every middle school student enrolled in a visual or performing arts class are but a few of the administrative changes mentioned in 28% of the sites. The grants helped raise knowledge about the value of arts in communities, and, educated parents about the need for the arts as basic education. Parents became strong and articulate advocates and defenders of art budgets.

Study Area #2: What Were the Challenges

Although there were a few persistent challenges, most issues proved less challenging than last year. The persistent ones were building partnerships (48% of the sites) and its twin, scheduling around mutual need (60% of the sites). These percentages are almost exactly the same as in year

one. However, there is now a growing awareness that partnering between busy people will always be a time challenge. And, there is growing acceptance that multiple groups have different lexicons and needs, but the same mission of infusing the arts into their own schools and communities even, as in one case, it took an outside facilitator to help see it. The challenge of scheduling and smooth partnerships is likely to remain, but *“if we remain the flexible and the reasonable people we are, we can work through this challenge”* summed up a program coordinator.

In addition to the ones reported in the past, a new challenge surfaced. Seven of the sites (28%) reported that encouraging reluctant staff was difficult, but not impossible. As consortiums are expanded, extra effort may be needed to move beyond the passionate instigators. The buy-in frustration is likely to be a natural growing pain. Some teachers fail to teach art concepts even though art is a required subject with clear goals and standards. Others may just lack confidence that comes with time and practice. One teacher captures many of her colleagues’ early hesitancy about teaching the arts by saying, *“This learning is still very new, so I’m not sure whether I’m ready to fly solo yet!”*

Anticipated Changes Growing From the Challenges

All but one grantee anticipated changes for next year, which is approximately a 20% increase from last year. Yet, the high numbers of grantees with projected changes belies its importance. Thoughtful changes are a good proxy for how seriously the grantees take being reflective practitioners. The refinements planned for next year tend toward collaboration (improving partnerships, involving more parents, and sharing lesson plans and resources with internal and external colleagues) and refinements of program offerings. While in year one, the projected changes represented a wide array of program improvements. Five types of refinements are planned for year three:

- Assessment and Curriculum Links
- Communication to Improve Partnering and Scheduling
- Sharing Lessons and Materials
- Expanding Offerings
- Restructuring Time Use

Study Area #3: Lasting Partnership Development

Looking at how the grants assist recipients in building partnerships to support lasting arts education programming gets to the heart of the program intent. The site reports suggest that as a school staff begins to see arts education as important, they tend to be more open to working with artists and arts organizations. The reverse is also true.

Two patterns emerged this year about setting up partnerships and giving them a chance of lasting:

- program design that is flexible and builds on local strengths
- governance structures that seek out parents, artists and businesses as active members and advisors, and participation of school board members

Study Area #4: Differences in Returning and Beginning Grantees

Perhaps the best way to capture the difference between returning and beginning grantees is to say returning ones more systematically infuse a consistent philosophy of participatory and integrated arts programming. The returning grantees pursue:

- Administrative changes to support the arts
- Program designs that promote knowledge about and strong emotional connections to art
- Family involvement in the consortiums
- On-going teacher training
- Mentorships between artists and teachers and between artists and students
- Arts integrated into daily teaching practice
- Continuous improvements based on evaluation

The arts are moving toward being a regular and expected part of school and community life because it has value of it's own, as well as making other things better. A superintendent said in reference to art and reading score gains, *"While there are many factors, I am sure that teaching kids to think with different parts of their brain in order to become artists is part of this improvement."*

Recommendations

Supporting Past Recommendations

The first set of comments are about program components that appear to be working well and should be retained. The first two comments on the application and selection process are recommendations from the first year report and the last comment is an acknowledgement of the value of the on-going technical support WSAC offers in promoting arts education.

Application and Selection Processes

- Continue to use the current selection criteria for beginning grantees.
- Returning grantees have a track record of success and are already turning to refinements. They may not appear as fresh or dynamic at first glance. Using the modified application started this past year will continue to be more illuminating for the selection panel as well as support the returning grantees as they move toward self-sufficiency.

Technical Assistance

- Keep the support roles of the outside arts education consultants, who are built into the partnership and budget of the application, and the technical support role of the WSAC staff. Grantees found both to be *"a light house on a stormy day"* as stated by one coordinator. They both play a vital role in program design and development.
- Continue to send out support information such as technical papers, evaluation reports, links to the web site for grantee synopsis, and other information and examples the WSAC staff think will be helpful. Some grantees are likely to be more assertive than others in seeking technical support. While reviewing all of the grantees' evaluation reports, it became clear that many grantees benefited from learning about their successful peers.

New Recommendations

Just as in year one, this report was created from data supplied by local sources and as such, conclusions gleaned from this report should be treated with caution. For example, just because a benefit or challenge was not mentioned, does not mean it was not present. In addition, there is some evidence that the benefits are synergistic and high frequencies do not necessary mean they are the most critical in the mix. In order to better understand the dynamics of the program, especially in returning grantees, all of the new recommendations center on evaluation. (See Appendix C for a sample list of additional evaluation questions to be sent out to grantees.)

1. Ask grantees to describe their governance and how decisions are made within their consortium. Given that returning grantees appear to be evolving participatory management practices, learning more about how these practices impact long-lasting partnerships will be insightful for guiding future technical support.
2. Ask grantees to discuss their philosophic approach, as well as how staff, artists, and parents learn about and consistently use it. The lessons from the returning grantees suggest that a carefully nurtured and consistent arts education philosophy pay off in the long run. Without a planned approach, program cohesion can be left to chance and the consortium is less likely to strengthen over time.
3. Conduct a case study of two or three highly successful grantees. Now that successful consortiums are running and lessons are surfacing, a more detailed look at the history and approaches of a few highly successful grantees will yield even more fruitful lessons for future support and direction.